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# Is Suicide Sin?

An Address made before  
The National Save-a-Life League  
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THOSE who know the facts and have studied statistics never hesitate to tell us that the vast majority of the ever increasing number of those who put an end to their own life do so with deliberation and are therefore accountable to God and society for the act they commit. We do not judge those who have lost their reason or (what is far more rare) are temporarily insane. Such are not always responsible for their conduct. But he who deliberately contemplates suicide and then commits the deed is guilty before God and man.

This is the well nigh universal verdict even among primitive races and according to all the great religious leaders of the ages. The Dyak headhunters of Borneo have no high code of ethics and yet when

a very rare case of a wife committing suicide occurred, we are told that "all the relatives stood over the corpse and beat it unmercifully accompanied with loud denunciation of her action because she had by her act disgraced the whole tribe." Here as among many other races the suicide did not receive honorable burial.

Plato and Aristotle both objected to self-destruction as cowardly and an offence against the state. Plato also declared it unnatural since a man is his own closest friend.\* When some of the Stoics suggested suicide as the way out of misery in the presence of Epictetus he said: "Wait for God, sirs; when he gives the signal and sets you free from this your service, you shall depart to him. For the present endure to live in the place where he has stationed you. Wait, do not depart unreasonably."† Only those Greeks and Romans who denied personal immortality ever advocated suicide. The Buddhist religion

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\* Plato's *Laws*: 873; Aristotle's *Ethics* V: 1138.

† *Dissertations I:IX:16.*

condemns it: "Any monk who says do away with this wretched life full of suffering and sin, death is better, preaches murder and is a murderer."\* Buddhist saints and Hindu saints never commit suicide in spite of all their ascetic practices. Religious opposition to suicide is found in all strata of civilization and in nearly all the ethnic faiths. Mohammed said: "Whosoever shall kill himself shall suffer in the fires of hell and be excluded from heaven forever." And no funeral prayer is said over him.\* Suicide is very rare in Moslem lands just because of the nature of a Moslem's belief in God and in a future life. He accepts all of life's events with submission as a divine appointment and will not gamble with eternity.

The teaching of the Bible in the Old and New Testaments leaves no doubt that all murder is sin and he who sheds his own blood is as guilty as he who sheds the blood of another. Only five cases of sui-

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\* Parajika iii.

\* Buchari's Traditions 23:84; 76:56; Muslin's Traditions 11:107.

cide are mentioned in the Bible. The story of poor, deluded King Saul and his armor-bearer on the field of battle; of Ahitophel the traitor; of Zimri the usurping King of Israel who reigned for seven days; and Judas Iscariot, the son of perdition who betrayed our Saviour with a kiss. Who would care to be numbered in their company?

It was the enemy of souls, the Devil, who tempted our Lord to suicide when he put him on a pinnacle of the Temple; and Christ's answer to this challenge for spectacular display was "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God." When the Phillipian jailer drew a sword during the earthquake, to put an end to his own life for fear of the Roman law of execution, Paul dissuaded him, saying "Do Thyself no harm." Both Christianity and Judaism have always denounced suicide as sin against one's own soul. The rabbis and the church fathers are at one in condemning it. St. Augustine during the dreadful days of the Hun and Goth invasions told Christian women not

to commit suicide although they feared violation because the latter was only the unwilling pollution of a body, but the former was the death of the soul. St. Thomas Aquinas denounced suicide as unnatural, contrary to charity, an offence against the community and a usurpation of God's power to kill and make alive.\*

Suicide is not only presumptuous, it is cowardly. The one who commits suicide refuses to play the game of life to the end. John Stuart Mill says that every suicide betrays lack of moral fibre. What right has a man who is losing the game to blow out the candle or brush the chess-men off the board? Why not take defeat honorably? Why not endure to the end and wrest victory from the very jaws of death? The alternative to suicide is to gain new desire to live from the source of all life, God—to lay hold of Christ who was tempted in all points like we are but without sin, and find in him comfort, strength, hope and forgiveness. Suicide is only possible when

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\* Summa ii.64.5.

a man fails to think the matter through. It is always a half-measure and settles no problem for any one. Shakespeare, the great interpreter of life, puts it all on the lips of Hamlet in his soliloquy:

"To be or not to be: that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural  
shocks

That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;  
To sleep: perchance to dream; ay, there's the  
rub;  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may  
come,

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause:"

". . . . the dread of something after death,  
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all."  
Suicide is sin because it betrays a trust.

The greatest gift any one has is life. Who

would spill it on the ground, and not rather treasure its every drop in the chalice God has given us. Suicide is sin because it seeks to usurp the function of the angel of death. He will come soon enough and without being summoned. Suicide is sin because it betrays impatience with men and with God. Those who possess their souls in patience and have learned to wait on God and rest in him are never tempted to put an end to their existence. Suicide is the coward's exit from the stage of life. It is heroic to face every kind of difficulty and to meet every obstacle with unruffled spirit, to fight the good fight until the end and to keep faith with our friends and with God.

Suicide is sin because it dishonors God. He is the giver of life and the upholder of life. To commit suicide is to push your way into the very presence of the Judge of all men, of the King of Kings, before you are summoned. Suicide is a sin against our own conscience; to think twice is to avoid it. Suicide is supreme folly and such fool-

ishness is sin. "Whoso findeth wisdom findeth life and shall obtain favor of Jehovah. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: All they that hate me love death." "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of the deeds done in the body."

The National Save-a-Life League was organized on April 19th, 1906, in New York City. Its object is the prevention of self-destruction or suicide. It ministers to anyone regardless of nationality, religious belief or social position, and is supported by legacies and voluntary contributions. It was incorporated in 1924 under the laws of the State of New York and is carried on by a Board of Trustees chosen annually by its members.

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